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Robert A. Nordyke MD

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"I am Third"

This issue of the Hawaii Medical Journal contains a book review by Alfred Morris MD about "I am third, an American boy of depression years - Memoirs of Robert A. Nordyke MD"

For fellow physicians at the Straub Clinic and Hospital, and other physicians throughout Hawaii and indeed the world, the reading of Bob's memoirs and the viewing of family photos is a genuine pleasure.

I thought I knew Bob when I prepared the Festschrift honoring Fred Gilbert MD in the July 1997 issue of the Journal,¹ where I reviewed Bob's biography and his many awards and publications, and was reminded of our personal friendship over the years consulting with him about patients and Straub activities. But when I read Ellie Nordyke's compilation of his memoirs I really got to know Bob Nordyke.

The research work that was done by Bob Nordyke in the Fred Gilbert Festschrift is reproduced here:

Description of Research Work Done by Robert A. Nordyke MD

Dr. Robert A. Nordyke is an internationally recognized specialist in nuclear medicine and a pioneer in the field of medical informatics, recognized for his development of computer-based medical records, databases, and clinical studies of thyroid disease. Since establishing the Department of Nuclear Medicine at Straub Clinic and Hospital in 1960, Dr. Nordyke has built a uniquely large and complex thyroid disease database, which has helped uncover many new facts about these frequently under-diagnosed diseases and about their treatments. He has demonstrated the correlation between size of a goiter (thyroid gland enlargement) and increased thyroid function (hyperthyroidism); has shown how the cure rate for hypothyroidism is affected by various drug combinations and dosages; and most recently, determined what is the most cost effective sequence of thyroid function testing for general hospital laboratory use. Dr. Nordyke developed, in collaboration with Casimir A. Kulikowski PhD, one of the earliest pattern recognition methods for computer decision support employing a combination of advanced statistical and logical reasoning techniques.

Dr. Nordyke's research, in collaboration with Dr. Fred Gilbert, led the research efforts on information systems for multi-specialty clinics, chronic disease clinics, and screening for breast cancer at the Pacific Health Research Institute (PHRI).

At a time when doctors kept patient records on 3x5 index cards and were viewing the computerization of medical records with suspicion, Dr. Nordyke recognized the power of computers as tools not just for keeping tidy notes, but for gathering and analyzing medical data in a way that would help direct doctors' diagnoses and treatments for patients. A visionary always bent on improving treatment for his patients, he was 30 years ahead of his time in realizing that the kinds of patients a doctor sees vary from practice to practice and that databases collected specifically for each practice improve the quality of patient care dramatically.

Bob Nordyke MD is a very special man, as indicated by George Chaplin, himself a very special man. Dr. Nordyke served as guest editor for the June 1995 Festschrift honoring Fred Gilbert MD. It was our largest and best Festschrift. Bob has received many accolades, accomplishments and awards – as described in his biography. Most recently he received a special recognition award from the Society of Nuclear Medicine, Hawaii Chapter.

Mahalo Nui Loa, Bob for the Fred Gilbert Festschrift, for your efforts to construct cabins at the YMCA Camp Erdman on Oahu's North Shore, for your years of research and administrative guidance at the Pacific Health Research Institute, for the many patients you have helped through the decades, and for your friendship.

Ellie Nordyke has received hundreds of letters from physicians, patients, and friends complimenting her and thanking her for completing the memoirs. As one of the many readers said, "if it's not blasphemy, he was first," referring to the subtitle "I am third. God is first, every one else is second, and I am third."

References

1. HMJ vol 56: 168 July 1997